



WORK SESSION of the Greenbelt City Council held Wednesday, January 30, 2002, for the purpose of discussing the future of the Greenbelt New Year celebration.

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:10 p.m. It was held in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, Alan Turnbull, Thomas X. White, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Joe McNeal, Community Center Supervisor; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Patti Brothers, chair, Greenbelt New Year Committee; Konrad Herling, Kevin Hammett, Larry Hilliard, Barbara Simon, Dan Hamlin, Ray Stevens, Agnes Scott, Austin Conti, and Jim and Susie Marley.

Mayor Davis said the need for the work session was not because there was doubt in anyone's mind that Greenbelt New Year has become an excellent and successful event; rather, the issue is whether City staff are carrying too much of the workload and responsibility for what is not a City function. There appears to have been an increasing problem with recruiting volunteers, not for the event itself, but for the planning and advance work. There is concern that this shifts increasingly more responsibility to staff and, in particular, places too heavy a burden on Ms. Brothers, who also chairs the Labor Day Festival committee.

Mr. McNeal commented that there are some responsibilities that are hard for volunteers to take on and which are more efficiently accomplished by using the existing structure of the Recreation Department: e.g., ticket sales and dispersal of funds. In addition, there are liability issues with, for example, having volunteers do decorations at great heights in City facilities. He said holding two of the five events in Recreation Department venues has to involve Recreation Department staff. Mr. Roberts said he did not see that there was necessarily any problem; everything seems to have been working well, and there haven't been any complaints. Mr. Putens said he tended to agree with Mr. Roberts and that the event clearly has to be a joint effort.

Mayor Davis asked Mr. Hilliard what his experience had been as committee chair for the first two years of Greenbelt New Year. He said it was hard to compare because the event has grown so much since it started. Now an expanded pool of volunteers is needed. One way to do this, he suggested, would be to promote the possibilities for volunteer organizations to make money, either by assuming responsibility for different activities or by rotating organizations each year to take a primary leadership role for the event. Another possibility, he suggested, would be to have various organizations provide a volunteer to work on either the Greenbelt New Year or the Labor Day Festival committees.

Mr. Herling was supportive of the idea of having more groups take ownership of activities, perhaps, though not necessarily, as fund-raisers. He noted the high quality of the arts events and described the use of the Old Greenbelt Theatre as "excellent."

Mr. White said asked what currently occurs over the course of the year, since that, rather than the night of New Year's Eve itself, seems to be the problem. Ms. Brothers responded that a wrap-up meeting is held subsequent to the event, but nothing further takes place until after Labor Day. Mr. Hilliard said that in 1998 the committee met monthly during the year.

Mr. White said he was concerned that Greenbelt New Year now looks so much like a City event that there is a disincentive for volunteering. He said it needs to be clear to the public that the City is facilitating the event, not running it.

Ms. Simon said she thought it was time for the event to become an independent community event. It should set up its own bank account, and the committee should take a hard look to see if volunteers can pick up any of what the Recreation Department staff is now doing.

Mayor Davis said she had some concern about nickel-and-diming people if too many groups were trying to raise money. Mr. McNeal commented that, at least in 1996, First Night in Annapolis was bringing in major donations. Mr. Hilliard responded that there is a big difference in having a professional organization run the event.

Mayor Davis asked if something could be done to divide responsibilities more formally between a volunteer group and the Recreation Department so that staff could plan appropriately.

Ms. Brothers said she did not believe running Greenbelt New Year should require year-round activity and meetings. She said not even Labor Day, which is considerably more massive, should require year-round commitment from volunteers. Mayor Davis suggested holding one meeting early in the year and then declaring a hiatus. Ms. Simon said she thought holding one early planning meeting, which would go beyond the existing wrap-up meeting from the prior year, might be helpful. Mr. Turnbull pointed out that another reason to hold an early planning meeting would be to coordinate better with the City budget process.

Mr. Hilliard asked if it would be appropriate for the committee to call a joint meeting with the Roosevelt Center merchants. Council said it would be and suggested getting in touch with the Roosevelt Center Merchants' Association.

Other Business: Mr. Roberts said he did not like having the format of work sessions be made more formal on Monday nights for the sake of cablecasting them, and Mr. Turnbull agreed. Mayor Davis suggested that "car-sharing" and "complaints about recycling bins" be added to the agenda for the stakeholder meeting with the GHI board. Mayor Davis reported briefly on having attended the second meeting of the State Highway Administration focus group on the beltway interchange. Several other informational items were also mentioned.

The meeting ended at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen Gallagher
City Clerk